

# Bill Snyder of Central Park Zoo to Quit

## Head Keeper and Great Elephant Trainer Employed in City's Menagerie to Retire After Thirty Years—Formed an Endowment Fund by Selling Surplus Animals

**B**ILL SNYDER is singing his song these days after thirty years of continuous service as keeper of the animals of the Central Park Zoo. His application for a pension based on thirty years hard work seven days a week and 365 days to the year is now before the Board of Estimate, and when all has been said and done along that line he will do anything except write a book on elephants. Not that he has anything against the honest pachyderm, which he thinks is the best friend of man and the most intelligent of all beasts, but having known elephants all his life he does not want to betray all of their secrets.

Although Bill can train anything from a canary to a hippopotamus, the elephant was his first love, and his fame, which is worldwide, is that of "Bill Snyder the elephant man." Thousands of children, year in and year out, have been amused by his wonderful skill with the big beasts, and even grave scientists have come to him to get more elephant wisdom.

At first, as he confesses after these many years, he was afraid of elephants, and although he was a country boy he never had any joy in watering them. It was not until after he had actually "joined on" with "The Greatest Show on Earth" that he made friends with them.

Bill was born fifty-five years ago on a farm near White Plains. His original name was William. He did chores about the place, wore red top boots with copper toes, yarn mittens and tippet in winter time, and went to Sunday school—sometimes. His family were of the good old stock, and Bill might have settled down as a farmer if it had not been for the circus boarders.

Most of the farmers about White Plains were taking camels and goats and yaks and pinto ponies and such creatures which were sent out from the crowded winter quarters of the Barnum circus at Bridgeport, about thirty miles from where Bill Snyder was born. Bill's father took some buffalo to board, and one day one of them got out of the barn and ran away. Bill went after him and traced the animal so close to Bridgeport that he put a ring in the creature's nose and took him in to winter quarters. He was only 18 then and husky for his age, and he had such a way with him that the head keeper asked how he would like to "join on." There was no vacancy then in the animal division, but Bill was ready to start in as a canvasser and he did on March 15, 1883.

There was in the herd a star pachyderm known as "The White Elephant." Just how much of an Albino Pilot was may be left to Jane. Scrubbing and rubbing do a great deal when persistently followed. Pilot pulled up his chain peg out at Chillicothe, Mo., in 1884 and started on a cross-country trek. Young Bill Snyder was of the searching party which found him. Pilot welcomed Bill as a long lost brother, and it was evident to everybody with the show after that that Snyder was a born elephant man.

So he was put to work breaking elephants to do tricks in the tanbark ring. Veteran keepers became his helpers and more and more "varmints" were put in Bill's school. He had charge of fourteen of the beasts before long, and in his last year on the road the string consisted of eighteen.

Although the smell of the tanbark has never lost its hold on Bill Snyder he decided in 1888 to lay off for a year and went to the Central Park zoo as a keeper. He became so interested in the work there, which he made all his own, that he stayed all these years.

Being an elephant specialist, it was not long before Bill had taught the one elephant the zoo had some few tricks and began looking for more apt pupils. The kind of elephants which circuses lend to park menageries are not tractable as a rule, and Bill, who had drilled around with the herd enough to know what could be done, selected some pupils which were worth while.

The best known graduate of the Central Park academy of trick elephants was Hattie, a young animal which Bill got in exchange for some zoological duplicates. She was named for the keeper's daughter Harriet. Often the two Hatties were seen together, for the girl learned from her father how to put the elephant through



• BILL SNYDER •  
HEAD KEEPER OF CENTRAL PARK ZOO.

many of the feats. Hattie, who is still a zoo star, is one of the best trained elephants in the world, and what with the magazines, the newspapers and the movies, she is known in every land under the sun. She can ring bells, sit at the table and eat a dinner with knife and fork, creep like a baby, walk on her hind legs, almost stand on her head, sit up and wave her off forefoot like a hand, and swing her trunk as though it were a drum major's baton. She has fourteen good tricks.

Hundreds of thousands of children know Hattie, for at times as many as 50,000 to 75,000 persons have crowded past the cages of the Central Park Zoo on a pleasant Sunday afternoon. Often special classes of school children went to see Prof. Snyder demonstrate the intelligence of his favorite student. Hundreds of the inmates of hospitals and institutions for crippled children have laughed and clapped their hands at the sight of the antics of this highly trained elephant.

Life with the elephants has not always been a pleasure for "Bill" Snyder, for the zoo has had two tragedies which stand out in its annals.

Adam Forepaugh gave to the park in 1889 the famous Asiatic elephant Tip, a magnificent specimen. Like so many elephants which reach maturity, Tip developed a disease which gave him an incurable temper. Tip is said to have killed eight men, and several times he nearly got away with the life of such an adept of the hook as William Snyder. His death warrant was finally signed and after several attempts Bill managed to dispose of him by feeding cyanide of potassium capsules to him in sweetened bran.

Tom, another elephant which was in the same house, was killed much in the same way on account of an ingrowing and malevolent disposition.

When all is said about the often evil ways of elephants, Bill Snyder still maintains that the huge beasts are after all the best and most intelligent friends of men.

"I always was fond of horses and dogs," said Bill the other day, "but taking it by and large the elephant is the ablest and best all around dumb creature on earth. Compared to his size the brain of an elephant is small. I've seen the brains of all the elephants ever killed in this zoo, and they do not look much bigger than does the brain of a man. With his little gray matter stuck away up in a

mass of bone the elephant does good work all the same. An elephant is not so anxious to learn stunts, but once he does he always remembers them. After elephants have been out of practice for months they will go back to their tricks.

"Their memory for words is good and they come as near knowing what a man is talking about as does any animal I know of. Monkeys can learn tricks, but they have nothing like the brain power that an elephant has. I never did take any stock in the idea that a monkey was kin to man, for there is nothing that shows that a monkey could develop any real intelligence. The elephant can think and he works and acts a good deal like a human being.

"I've seen elephants pushing a string of freight cars about and doing it as though they were engineers. Hattie here in the zoo can drag a snow plough over the walks all by herself and do it just as well as if a man were bossing the job. The elephant can do more work with less fuss than any other animal.

"Just right here let me say that there is little in the idea that elephants hold grudges against people that injure them. The elephant has a good memory, but he is not a good hater. There is nothing to the old story about the tailor who stuck a needle into an elephant's hide and was killed for that act twenty years later. Likewise there is no foundation, as far as I know, for all the stories that are told about the fellow who gives a plug of tobacco to some circus elephants and gets his when the show plays a return engagement years and years afterward. No elephant will take anything from a man if he does not want it—that is, not from any man he meets in a circus. Some elephants like tobacco, just as most monkeys do. Jumbo was the biggest tobacco chewer I ever knew. He would ask for a chew the minute you came near him and start to take it out of a keeper's pocket. Elephants do not kill people usually unless they are suffering from disease or madness, for their natural disposition is friendly."

Next to the elephant, Bill Snyder is partial to the hippopotamus. The reason for that may be that these animals have long been the financial backbone of the Central Park Zoo. For the last eighteen years, ever since Snyder was made head keeper and also under his administration of the last seven years as director, the menagerie has been self-supporting as far as acquisition of animals is concerned. There is now a reserve fund of \$3,000 which Bill will leave when he goes out of office.

The excess of the creatures which have been bred in the Central Park cages have in all these years, been exchanged and sold, and of the amounts realized at least \$90,000 should be credited to Mr. and Mrs. Caliph. The maiden name of the mother of famed hippopotami was Miss Murphy. She was bought from Hagenback in 1886 for \$5,000, and is now about 35 years old. The pair are now appraised at \$50,000. Their children, of which there were thirteen, were scattered all over the world and six of them at least are star performers in the leading circuses.

Snyder has had wonderful success in breeding lions in captivity and especially in keeping them in condition. All the lions in the park zoo never saw the jungle, nor did they raven in the tropic night. The reason that they look so fierce and fit is that they have been dieted and medicined for years by Bill Snyder, who knows exactly how to meet all the ills which are likely to come from their artificial life. He feeds them with great care during the week and makes them fast on Sundays, for his experience has shown that the carnivores are better for it. All the vegetarians of the zoo eat seven days a week.

The most motherly of the lions is Helen, now well on in years, who has given birth to thirty-three cubs, and, although a great-grandmother, is likely within a few weeks to present another family to the zoo. The father of her children is Leo H., the successor to Leo L., who was the leading lion when Bill Snyder took hold in the animal houses.

The queen of his heart was Rose, who has long since been dead. Among the noted lions born in captivity and still headliners in the park circuit are Akbar and Tamerlane, named by former Park Commissioner Slover, and Dewey, who

came into this earth plane at the time when the hero of Manila Bay returned in triumph. The Central Park lions have been often used as models by the leading sculptors and painters of the country.

Snyder is especially fond of the Siberian tiger Dick, one of the finest specimens extant, of which he has taken great care. One of the achievements of Bill Snyder was keeping alive and presentable that venerable jungle relic Smiles, the rhinoceros. Smiles died only a few days before last Christmas, thereby greatly aiding the conservation of distilled liquors. She was bought from Cole's circus in 1873 and was at least half a century old when she died.

For the last ten years she lived on borrowed time and Bill Snyder was the broker. Every two weeks she was rubbed with neatfoot oil to keep her from wrinkling up and breaking at her creaking joints. The animal was protected from draughts, fed with warm bran mash, and whenever she seemed to be especially thirsty she got a quart of the best whiskey.

These are a few of the animals in which Bill Snyder has been especially interested in his long career among the cages, yet there are hardly any of the beasts and birds which have not been under his ministrations. He knows by instinct what animals need, and although he is not a veterinarian he prescribes remedies for his numerous patients which are usually panaceas for everything except old age and poison. He lost a pair of fine camels not long ago, but the autopsy showed that the beasts had been poisoned by some malicious person. Even at that he nearly saved their lives. He prescribes for monkeys and toucans and parakeets, for nygahs, yaks and dromedaries. He will be sorely missed when finally he goes away, for the creatures with whom he has lived so long will miss him, although he says that he doesn't believe it.

"Animals," said Bill the other day, "are like persons. They have their different ways and dispositions. It takes years of study to get used to them and to understand them. When you get their confidence they will do a whole lot for you, and they know more than most people believe they do. I've often been asked if they have a language of their own. I have been watching animals and listening to them long enough to have an opinion about that and I don't take any stock in it at all. I've seen all kinds of records taken on the phonograph and have heard the scientific folks go all over the subject, but I never saw anything that would bear out the idea that there was any real conversation.

"Some people look surprised when I tell them that I have applied to go away from here. I've been at this business, man and boy, for going on forty years, and that includes thirty with the city. Believe me, it is not so easy as it was to go into an elephant cage and to be ready to jump at the second in case there comes a sudden swat of a trunk. It's all very well to work among the animals all day and maybe to sit up with some of them all night, but there comes a time when a man has passed 50 that he has had about enough.

"Sometimes in going around here, cutting up the meat for cat animals and seeing that the hippos chew up hay proper, I feel that a younger man could do these things a whole lot better. However, I've had enough experience and pleasure out of this work to make me feel that I have done something in life.

"Now that the zoo is self-supporting in a way I think that this would be a good time for me to go. I've made a lot of friends and got many messages of appreciation from people, especially from those who haven't the money to go to circuses or even to spend for carfare to go long distances. Then, too, there are many of the rich who have taken a great interest in this zoo, for although it doesn't take up very much space it is considered by some as the best known in the world. I've met many travellers from distant countries who have come here when visiting New York to see the animals they have heard about in their own countries, and some of them knew the names of our elephants and lions as well as folks who lived in the city."

If the city grants the application of Snyder he will leave on March 1 with a pension of half pay.